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SUBJECT: A/S CARSON DISCUSSES FOOD SECURITY IN ETHIOPIA

REF: (A) ADDIS ABABA 1348
(B) ADDIS ABABA 1556
(C) ADDIS ABABA 1498

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) In a meeting with humanitarian community representatives, Assistant Secretary Johnnie Carson described the Obama administration's plans to promote food security by emphasizing agricultural development. Participants described Ethiopia's chronic food insecurity and Government of Ethiopia (GoE) denials of the severity of the situation, noting that only a comprehensive approach - addressing agricultural development, climate change, population control, land tenure, and government regulation - will help Ethiopia achieve food security. END SUMMARY.

ETHIOPIA'S CHRONIC FOOD INSECURITY

¶2. (U) On July 7, Assistant Secretary Carson met with representatives of USAID, UN agencies, the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), CARE, Save the Children - UK, and Food for the Hungry International to discuss Ethiopia's food security needs and the Obama administration's planned shift from humanitarian food aid to agricultural and other development assistance.

¶3. (SBU) Attendees described Ethiopia's chronic food insecurity (Ref A), which is exacerbated by outdated agricultural practices, rapid population growth, an unstable land tenure policy, climate change, and myriad GoE regulatory and economic policies. The group noted that Ethiopia's food needs are greater than usual this year owing to successive seasons of failed rains, including the failure of the belg (spring) rains earlier this year (Ref B).

GOE CONTINUES TO DOWNPLAY HUNGER

¶4. (SBU) Despite agreement amongst the humanitarian community that at least 6.6 million Ethiopians are currently in need of relief food aid (Ref C), the GoE continues to downplay need, citing its own figure of 4.9 million. (Note: Neither of these figures includes the 7.5 million people currently receiving food assistance through the donor-funded Productive Safety Net Program. End Note.) The GoE's refusal to admit the full extent of the problem is based on both its fear of international embarrassment (and subsequent impact on security and investment) and domestic political concerns. Denials are also linked to the GoE's firm belief that all development must be directed and provided by the government.

¶5. (SBU) However, at the local level, there is a strong recognition of growing hunger. Woreda officials, for whom hungry constituents are more visible, are not towing the GoE line on food need and

requests for assistance. This politicization of hunger breaks down the trust that the GoE will need to enact sustainable solutions to its food needs.

WHILE EMERGENCY FOOD AID IS NOT SUSTAINABLE...

¶ 6. (SBU) The humanitarian organizations represented stressed that without a new strategy, Ethiopia's food needs will increase, owing to climate change and a population growth. For both of these reasons, and in light of donor resource constraints, providing emergency food aid is not sustainable. A/S Carson noted that the Obama administration's first major initiative in Africa will focus on sustainable agricultural development, adding that without a new dialogue on food security, everyone will pay a price. Those who are hungry pay the greatest price, and every dollar spent to save a person from crisis is a dollar not spent to develop that person.

...FOOD SECURITY REQUIRES A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

¶ 7. (SBU) While praising plans to focus on agricultural development, attendees encouraged a comprehensive approach to food security. For example, climate change will have a major impact on the agriculture sector in Ethiopia, and plans must specifically consider that impact. From a broader perspective, food security cannot be achieved without macroeconomic and regulatory reforms, including the strengthening of land tenure. Moreover, food security cannot be achieved without population control - which the GoE has the capacity, if not the political will, to improve.

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